



The Navajo Nation Office of the President and Vice President

MEDIA CONTACTS:

Jared Touchin, Communications Director
Crystalyne Curley, Sr. Public Information Officer

(928) 871-7000

nnopvp.communications@gmail.com

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

April 30, 2021

President Nez offers support for infrastructure projects related to the Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement Act and rural road development

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez was invited to a meeting hosted by the Seven County Infrastructure Coalition, which was held on Thursday at Navajo Mountain Chapter in the western part of the Navajo Nation to meet with Utah Lt. Gov. Diedre Henderson, Council Delegate Herman Daniels, Jr., Chapter leaders and officials, and County representatives to discuss efforts to secure resources and to meet the requirements for the implementation of water projects in accordance with the Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement Act that was approved by Congress and signed into law in December 2020.



PHOTO: Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez addresses local leaders and state and county officials at Navajo Mountain Chapter on April 29, 2021.

The Seven County Infrastructure Coalition was established in 2014 comprised of seven counties in the state of Utah that include San Juan, Carbon, Daggett, Duchesne, Emery, Sevier, and Uintah, to identify revenue-producing infrastructure assets that will benefit the region that includes portions of the Navajo Nation. San Juan County Commission Willie Grayeyes played an instrumental role in bringing the groups together for Thursday's meeting.

"We have a water settlement in place with the state of Utah. Now, the next step of this collaborative effort is to move forward on implementing water infrastructure projects to deliver the water to families and to homes in the Navajo-Utah communities. The Navajo Nation has to work together with the state and the counties to work through the regulations and secure additional funds that will benefit the state and our Nation. I appreciate our local Navajo leaders,

the County officials including Commissioner Grayeyes, and Lt. Gov. Henderson for sitting down with us and discussing these important issues,” said President Nez.

The Navajo Utah Water Rights Settlement Act included the following provisions:

- Settlement of all current and future claims by the Navajo Nation for water rights within the State of Utah
- Ratified the proposed water rights settlement between the Navajo Nation and the State of Utah, and confirmed the Navajo Nation’s right to deplete 81,500 acre-feet of water per year from Utah’s Colorado River Basin apportionment
- Authorized approximately \$220 million for water infrastructure to provide water infrastructure, which will provide clean drinking water, to Navajo communities in Utah.

Following the discussion at Navajo Mountain Chapter, the groups toured a long stretch of dirt road between the communities of Navajo Mountain and Oljato, where many Navajo citizens reside. The two communities are approximately 30 miles apart, however, the only paved route to get from one community to the other requires commuters to travel over 100 miles through several communities.

As a former member of the Navajo Nation Council, President Nez was instrumental in securing funds from the Utah Navajo Trust Fund for a feasibility study to determine which route would be most cost-effective and beneficial for local Navajo residents.

“Having the Lt. Governor and County officials see the current road conditions firsthand offers them great insight into the challenges that Navajo people deal with every day. Many residents commute through these rocky terrains for long hours each day for basic services and necessities, hauling water for their homes and livestock, and going to school

and work. Not only would paving the road benefit residents, it would also increase tourism in the area and create jobs and revenue for the Navajo Nation, the counties, and the entire state. This road project will require significant investments at the start, but it will pay for itself and create additional benefits in the long-term,” President Nez stated.

According to the Seven County Infrastructure Coalition, the road project would cost over \$110 million. The group is focusing efforts on drawing funds from several sources, which will require support and advocacy from the Navajo Nation and others.

President Nez noted that Nez-Lizer Administration’s transportation white paper titled, “Diné Atiin Bahane: Navajo Road Emergence,” which requests the federal government to enact



PHOTO: Navajo Nation President Jonathan Nez, Council Delegate Herman Daniels, Jr., Utah Lt. Gov. Deidra Henderson, and Navajo Nation Attorney General Doreen N. McPaul and Division Directors JT Willie, Garret Silversmith, and Dr. Rudy Shebala at Navajo Mountain Chapter on April 29, 2021.

seven specific policy changes to improve the Navajo Nation's transportation system could also work to benefit the proposed road project. The white paper was submitted to U.S. Secretary of Transportation Pete Buttigieg on March 30, which outlines specific challenges and successes related to transportation projects and initiatives in support of the recommended policy changes.

"We have to continue working together and meeting on a regular basis to strategize and to make sure that we tap into all available resources, which may include the American Rescue Plan Act and the Biden-Harris Administration's proposed American Jobs Plan that would provide transportation infrastructure funds. We appreciate Lt. Gov. Henderson for visiting the Navajo Nation and we look forward to continuing to work with her and Gov. Spencer Cox on water and transportation infrastructure initiatives," added President Nez.

President Nez was also joined by Navajo Nation Attorney General Doreen N. McPaul and Division Directors JT Willie, Garret Silversmith, and Dr. Rudy Shebala.

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